

Abraham Lincoln papers

From Abraham Lincoln to John Ross [Draft]¹, September 25, 1862

¹ On September 12, 1862 Ross conferred with Lincoln, at which time Lincoln requested that the objects of Ross's visit be communicated in writing. Ross complied on September 16 (see Ross to Lincoln, September 16, 1862), emphasizing the treaty obligation of the United States to protect the Cherokee. When that protection was withdrawn early in the war, the Indians were forced to negotiate a treaty they did not want with the Confederacy. Ross affirmed the loyalty of the Cherokee to the United States, and asked Lincoln to issue a proclamation "which will enable me to make assurances in behalf of the Government in which they can confide—" Lincoln's reply follows.

This letter is indicative of the very minimal attention Lincoln was able to give to Indian affairs during the Civil War, aside from the Dakota War in Minnesota later in 1862. It also illuminates the difficult situation of the Cherokee and their tribal neighbors, subject as they were to strong Confederate influence from the east in Arkansas, and being afforded almost no Federal protection from the north in Kansas.

Executive Mansion,

Washington, Sept. 25, 1862

Sir:

Your letter of the 16th. Inst. was received two days ago. In the multitude of duties cares claiming my constant attention I have been unable to examine and determine the exact treaty relations between the United States and the Cherokee Nation. Neither have I been able to investigate and determine the exact state of facts claimed by you as constituting a failure of treaty obligation on our part, and justifying or excusing, the Cherokee Nation to make for making a treaty with a portion of the people of the United States in open rebellion against the government thereof— This letter, therefore, must not be understood to decide anything upon these questions. I shall, however, cause a careful investigation of them to be made— Meanwhile the Cherokee people remaining practically loyal to the federal Union will receive all the protection which can be given them consistently with the duty of the government to all parts of the the whole country. No more than this can safely be promised, even to the loyal white people of Missouri, or other border states— I sincerely hope the Cherokee country may not again be over-run by the enemy; and I shall do all I consistently can to prevent it.

Your Obt. Servt.

A. Lincoln.

[Endorsed by Lincoln:]

True copy.

[Copy in John G. Nicolay's hand:]

(Copy)

Washington, September 25, 1862.

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Meanwhile the Cherokee people remaining practically loyal to the Union will receive all the protection which can be given them consistently with the duty of the Government to all parts of the country. No more than this can safely be promised, even to the loyal white people of Missouri, or the Border States. I sincerely hope the Cherokee Country may not again be over-run by the enemy; and I shall do all I consistently can to prevent it. Your Obt. Servt.

A. Lincoln²

2 Signature in Lincoln's hand.